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ABSTRACT

Underutilization of evaluation findings relative to the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) legislation may not stem primarily from factors usually identified in the literature (e.g., methodological reasons) but may be superseded by a more potent factor such as the prominence of the policy or program on the national agenda. Viewed from an evaluator's perspective, strategies to increase use of evalation findings and barriers which may prevent such use are seen as having methodological or organizational roots. However, the slow but identifiable shift from decategorized to more categorized employment and training programs can be traced through a series of strong federal administrative initiatives that have altered the balance of power between federal, state, and local government delivery of employment and training activities. CETA, then, must be viewed as more than a training program. It is a part of national economic policy, and as such, responds to some of the ideas in good currency (e.g., high unemployment) which are then politically subsumed under its rubric. Therefore, by looking at programs in relation to (1) their place on the national agenda and (2) the ideas in good currency to which they relate, evaluators could more clearly focus evaluation questions in order to meet the needs of decision makers. Other types of evaluation activity, such as economic and other outcome factors, will also have a better chance of having an impact on policy making because they more directly adress ideas in good currency. (MEK)

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# EVALUATION ISSUES IN THE COMPREHENSIVE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACT (CETA) LEGISLATION

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# EVALUATION ISSUES IN THE COMPREHENSIVE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACT (CETA) LEGISLATION

Increasingly, the social sciences are being called upon to access the effectiveness and efficiency of social programs. Evaluation requirements have been incorporated into education, health, housing, community development, criminal justice, mental health, and employment and training legislation to name a few. Undergirding these mandates is the assumption that evaluation will improve programs effectiveness by providing information to improve decision-making.

However, is this assumption true? It has been postulated that "utilization has been evaluation's weakest link." (Carlson, 1979:56) The literature is replete with reasons behind the underutilization of evaluation findings (for example see Patton, 1978; Steele, 1977; Guba, 1972; Hamilton et al., 1977). They include the following:

o Since program evaluation occurs in an action setting, many questions have been raised about the feasibility of using traditional research methodology (i.e., experimental design). For example, Weiss (1970) asks: If an employment and training program operates in an area and the unemployment rate remains the same, what do we know? Or, to rephrase the question, what evaluation information was obtained on which to base a reformulation of the program and the policy? In addition, the general problem of securing control groups and randomizing experiments, using human subjects, has often been addressed (e.g., Stahler, 1972).

o Programs often have unclear and/or multiple objective, stressing individualized service delivery (Guttentag, 1973). For example, employment and training programs implement a variety of activities and services covering a multitude of program objectives (e.g., reducing poverty, reducing unemployment,

increasing productivity of human resources) which may be competitive. This situation often leads to confusion when evaluators design objectives-based evaluation studies.

o The imposition of artificial and arbitrary restraints on the scope of a study may lead to the neglect of other information salient to the implementation question (Hamilton et al., 1977). This move toward defining study boundaries using reductionism often results in myopic findings that fail to account for the interplay of factors that affect the program or policy.

Public policies and programs, especially those in the human resources area, are dynamic and complex. Many actors and events critically impinge upon the direction by which these policies and programs are formulated, implemented, evaluated, and reformulated. While the reasons behind the underutilization of evaluation findings cited above hamper most evaluation efforts, these concerns become more critical in the evaluation and implementation of large-scale social programs that are both diverse and complex in their purpose and administration. For example, many social scientists believe in rationality, i.e., the best knowledge available should be used in the formulation of public policy. Weiss (1972:33) stated: "when good theory and good data are placed at the service of policy makers, the subsequent decisions will be sounder and wiser." However, as Carlson (1979:56) said "programs administrators and service delivery staff cannot be expected to be highly rational; they are caught in a pressured situation that demands responsiveness more than clarity relationships, and connections more than effectiveness." This argument for incremental decision-making may be traced to Lindblom (1956) whereby partisan mutual adjustment becomes a principle method to reconcile competing differences through which public policy is formulated. The notion of incremental decision-making partially explains the most

recent findings of Patton (1978) and Alkin (1979) where evaluation results were perceived as useful by evaluators and decision-makers. In both cases, the definition of utilization was broadened, concentrating less on the direct impact on decision-making by expanding the definition of utilization to include the gradual influences on administrator perceptions of the evaluated program.

Concern over the underutilization of evaluation findings has led to the identification of strategies that may promote utilization of findings. For example, Alkin et al. (1979) introduces an analytic framework which described the evaluation situation and is deemed to have relevance for the understanding of utilization. Eight categories were identified: (1) preexisting evaluation bounds, (2) orientation of the users, (3) evaluator's approach, (4) evaluator credibility, (5) organizational factors, (6) extraorganizational factors, (7) information context and reporting, and (8) administrator style. Patton (1978:284) identified two basic requirements to a utilization-focused approach to evaluation:

> First, relevant decision-makers and information users must be identified and organized--real, visible, specific and caring human beings, not ephemeral, general, and abstract 'audiences', organizations, or agencies. Second, evaluators must work activily, reactively, and adaptively with these identified decision-makers and information users to make all other decisions about the evaluation--decisions about research focus, design methods, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination.

These strategies are generally viewed from the evaluator's perspective as focusing upon methodological and organizational concerns. The remainder of this paper seeks to look at the utilization of evaluation findings for one specific piece of legislation--the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973 (CETA) as amended. In doing so, it will illustrate that the underutilization of evaluation findings may not primarily stem from the factors

usually identified in the literature (e.g., methodological reasons) but may be superseded by a more potent factor, i.e., the prominence of the policy or program on the national agenda.

CETA--A Brief History. CETA was the first in a series of special revenue sharing grants which transferred control over a larger portion of federal revenues to state and local jurisdictions (prime sponsors) for flexible use in lieu of a variety of categorical employment and training programs. Thus, CETA represented an attempt to alter a piecemeal system of employment and training programs by implementing two basic premises undergirding intergovernmental relations:

- o decentralization--local authorities know best local needs and how to respond to them; and,
- o decategorization--to deal effectively with those needs, maximum flexibility in the use of resources should replace the system of categorical programs.

With CETA the basic framework of a decentralized, decategorized employment and training delivery system was laid. However, since the inception of CETA in 1973, there appears to be a slow, but identifiable, shift from decategorized to more categorized employment and training programs. Kruger and Curry (1978:46) suggest that:

> despite a surplus of fanfare and rhetoric, it is clear that Congress did not intend CETA to be a decategorized manpower program as many local officials would like to believe or were led to believe. In fact, there is evidence that both Congress and the Department of Labor have attempted to limit local flexibility to the greatest extent possible.

Two recent examples reflect this trend.

(1) The federal role as defined under CETA, includes the basic function of assuring prime sponsor compliance with the Act, reviewing prime sponsors' plans and assessing program performance. In an effort to carry out these functions, the Department of Labor has taken a series of steps which give

it increased power and control over prime sponsors. These steps include: more stringent assessment of the prime sponsors' grant applications and the development of national performance standards such as entered employment rates, and indirect placement rates (Kruger and Curry, 1978; National Commission for Manpower Policy, 1976).

Program performance indicators are generally considered to be a move towards nationally established program performance standards. The establishment of national performance standards, in turn, often are feared to lead to eventual control over the mix of employment and training services prime sponsors choose. The National Council on Employment Policy has stated that "centralized performance goals run counter to the spirit of the CETA. Individual prime sponsors and their programs are as unalike as apples and oranges; attempting to apply a single standard to them denies local initiatives" (Kruger and Curry, 1978:46).

(2) A second example of the erosion of block grant flexibility comes from recent legislative action by the Congress. Originally, Congress was reluctant to have the public service employment program become one of the allowable activities under Title I. As a result, Title II was authorized and funded for this purpose. In response to the increasing unemployment rate and the economic recession, Congress added a new Title VI (the Emergency Jobs and Unemployment Assistance Act) to CETA in 1974, which was later extended. Most recently Congress has added several specific youth programs to CETA by expanding Title III and adding Title VIII (Kruger and Curry, 1978; National Commission for Manpower Policy, 1976) as well as several targeted programs such as the Private Sector Initiatives Program (PSIP) and Skill Training Initiatives Program (STIP).

Although these enactments include some features of the block grant approach, they

> clearly illustrate that Congress harbors second thoughts on the authorization of block grants, generally and CETA specifically. The Congressional tendency to give flexibility and then to withdraw that same flexibility over time can be clearly observed. In fact, the Congress is now beginning to administer the public employment program through legislation. The . . . Emergency Jobs Program Extension Act goes so far as to establish specific criteria for determining participant eligibility for the jobs funded under Title VI. The prime sponsor's option to determine whom among the unemployed is to be served with this portion of the funds has been eliminated. In addition, the prime sponsors' program planning flexibility--never anything to brag about in the public employment program--has been further eroded. The purposes for which the money is to be spent, and in what time frame are specific and are dictated from the banks of the Potomac. The prime sponsor is a project director administering a federal program through designated program agents (National Commission for Manpower Policy, 1976:211).

Thus, these two actions add to the uncertainties surrounding the intent of CETA and the future role of decentralized, decategorized employment and training programs.

In addition, the erosion of flexibility may be traced through a series of federal administrative initiatives that have altered the balance of power between the federal, state, and local governments delivery employment and training activities. Snedeker and Snedeker (1978) cite the following examples:

1. The increasing pressure on prime sponsors to use the employment service for placement, and the increasing pressure to service WIN, federal supplemental benefits recipients, and Trade Readjustment Act beneficiaries.
2. The increased efforts from the national office to link the employment services and CETA in order to deal with some service duplication (e.g., intake, referral, job development).

3. The increasing number of administrative guidelines from the national and regional offices.
4. The increased influence of regional offices as grant review guidelines became more detailed, federal annual performance assessments more serious, and the required potential grant modifications more frequent.
5. The national performance standards threatened prime sponsor programming flexibility and the tendency of some prime sponsors to rationalize short-term, quick-placement programs while focusing little attention to employability development. Local flexibility was also threatened by national office efforts such as the 1976 attempt to limit work experience to a ninety-day enrollment.
6. The enforcement of a rehire formula for public service employees.
7. The prohibition of planning council members representing subgrantees or community-based groups from participating in discussions on service issues.

The examples cited above illustrate the beginning of a movement in the delivery of employment and training activities from decentralized, decategorized service delivery, toward efforts to categorize employment and training services. Together they identify strains in the relationship between federal, state, and local governments as they vie for more control over the delivery of employment and training services. Snedeker and Snedeker (1979: 259-260) illustrate some of these strains:

> Two years into the era of decentralization and decategorization, it was apparent that many were having second thoughts. Chief among then was Congress for whom local decision-making was an abnormal and uncomfortable way of doing the public's business. Decentralization and decategorization offer Congress neither power nor recognition, whereas established programs directed from Washington provided both. And CETA proved to have a low

level of national visibility. Because the programs are visibly active only within local communities, the general public does not seem to identify CETA activities with the federal government. Local elected officials, rather than members of Congress, are generally given the credit for program success. Since Congress is still responsible for overall accountability, complaints of disgruntled clients or would-be clients end up in their offices. Reports of program abuses or malfunctions result in particularly intense concern by Congress. The prospect of being blamed for program failures, coupled with a lack of knowledge or identification with positive program results, push members of Congress toward tighter federal control.

CETA, then, must be viewed in a broader framework for it is more than solely a training program. This may be illustrated by the distribution of CETA program funds. Beyond being a training program, CETA represents:

1. a continuation of a commitment to assisting the nation's unemployed through federal programming;

2. a component of national macroeconomic policy;

3. an example of intergovermental relationships whereby an overlapping framework emerged between multiple levels of governments to deliver services to specific target populations;

4. a shift in programming from fragmentation and duplication as a result of categorical programs to coordinated programming under a block grant approach; and,

5. an alteration of the balance of power from functional specialists operating pre-CETA programs to elected authorities (e.g., mayors, governors).

Ideas in Good Currency. Ideas in good currency such as the "Space Race" of the sixties and the "Law and Order" movement of the late sixties and early seventies "are ideas powerful for the formation of public policy. Among their most characteristic features are these: They change over time; they obey a law of limited number; and, they lag behind changing events..." (Schon, 1971:123-124).

Milward (1979:11) states that "new ideas in good currency usually emerge from a disruptive event or a series of events. These perceived crisis set up a demand in society for new ideas to solve these problems." Not all ideas in good currency reach the legislative agenda and become programs. Many ideas are "slow to come into good currency... and by the time ideas have come into good currency they often no longer accurately reflect the state of affairs." (Schon, 1971:127). Also, the pressure of competing ideas for both public attention and available resources often limits the transition of the ideas into programs. The remainder of this section traces the emergence of employment and training policy as it has been associated with one, or several, ideas in good currency.

Employment and training legislation by and large has represented a reaction to the economic and political climates existing at the time. For example, during the Depression, the response to massive unemployment resulted in a shift in responsibility from public assistance to the federal government through such programs as the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Project Administration. With the termination of World War II concern arose again over the possibility of massive unemployment; hence, the Employment Act of 1946 was enacted. During the early sixties, attention was focused on stimulating economic growth in areas of high unemployment (Area Redevelopment Act). President Kennedy later presented a more comprehensive program to Congress--Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA)--which marked the beginning of an effort to tackle human resource problems by authorizing and implementing categorical programs aimed at providing education and training opportunities for the unemployed. Poverty legislation continued this thrust by broadening the spectrum of

new categorical programs. The Economic Opportunity Act targeted its funds to the economically disadvantaged through multiple categorical programs (e.g., Job Corps, Neighborhood Youth Corps, Operation Mainstream). Beginning in 1973, the Nixon administration began a wholesale rejection of the Great Society programs. The fragmentation and duplication of service delivery led to the implementation of administrative initiatives like the Comprehensive Manpower Program in an effort to operationalize the concept of revenue sharing. In 1973, the final step toward decentralization of employment and training programs was taken with the passage of CETA. However, one year after its passage, increasing unemployment rates provided the impetus for amending CETA to include a public service employment program (Title VI). Subsequent rises in the unemployment rates of youth and inner city youth in particular gave rise to the addition of new youth programs. Other target programs have also been funded such as the Private Section Initiatives Program (PSIP) and the Skill Training Initiatives Program (STIP).

Evaluating Ideas in Good Currency. The evaluation of CETA efforts to date have been relatively sparce. Perry et al. (1976) published a review of over 200 pre-CETA studies (most of which were unpublished government reports or private foundation reports) primarily studying a single economic outcome (e.g., change in hourly earnings, change in employment history). The CETA evaluation literature is predominantly descriptive focusing on the transition from categorical programs to CETA (e.g., Mirengoff and Rindler, 1976; ACIR, 1977); the implementation of CETA by prime sponsors (e.g., Ripley, 1977, 1978); single case studies of specific prime sponsor organizations (e.g., Kobrak, 1976); policy issues (e.g., National Commission for Manpower Policy, 1975, 1978); and exemplary programs (e.g., featured programs in

Worklife). Prime sponsor evaluation generally are more program monitoring in nature such as tracking actual versus planned performance on a quarterly basis and follow-up studies of former participants.

By and large, these evaluation efforts focus on improving the implementation of a portion of employment and training policy as funded under CETA. Major changes in service delivery modes by prime sponsors usually are directly connected to legislative and administrative initiatives on the national level. That is, the addition of new programs or broadening of service to specific target groups often result from additional funding received through new titles or responses to nationally competitive requests for proposals. These legislative changes, in turn, may be viewed as emerging from ideas in good currency. As previously argued, CETA is more than a training program. It is a part of national economic policy and, as such, responds to some of the ideas in good currency (e.g., high unemployemnt) subsumed under the rubric. It is also an example of intergovernmental relations in action. As such, CETA is a vehicle and not an end in itself. Halperin (1979:28) draws the same distinction for education. He stated

> ...the 'Feds' utilize education institutions to pursue more specific goals...In other words, education may be the mode of delivery but it is not the major organizing concept for, or the primary intended beneficiary of, federal programs.

This notion of looking at programs in light of their position on the national agenda is central to the design of evaluations and the degree of utilization of evaluation findings. It becomes more important when the program being evaluated is in response to an idea in good currency because:

o Ideas in good currency may be placed on a temporal continuum. On one end are those ideas that at one time were in good currency but have since waned. Current ideas in good currenty occupy the opposite end of the continuum. For example, once an idea in good currency is translated into a

policy, programs are created to administer them. Milward (1979:11) illustrates this point with Veterans Affairs offices which administer services and benefits based upon the existence of universal conscription--a case of an idea in good currency whose time ended with the implementation of a volunteer army but which continues to be preserved by interest groups controlled by Worl War II veterans. On the other end of the continuum are those ideas that consistently remain in good currency (although the degree of public attention may fluctuate due to other crises). Ideas aimed at improving the operation of the economy fall into this latter category; and,

o Policies (and their resultant programs) may be tied to more than one idea in good currency. In these cases the ideas provide different ways of designing the evaluation questions. For example, Farley (1979) identified over 250 different outcomes of vocational education that appear in the literature. Which outcome or outcomes are the most important and thus should be evaluated? The identification of the specific ideas in good currency to the policy is tied will aid in focusing the evaluation questions.

The point to be made is that policies (and their resultant programs) should not all be evaluated in the same way. While few would argue that evaluation information should be an important input into the formulation, implementation, and reformulation of policies, other factors will often supersede. This is especially true when the policy addresses an idea currently in good currency where political factors will (and should) play a prominent role in policy making. However, by looking at programs in relation to (1) their place on the national agenda, and (2) the ideas in good currency to which they relate, evaluators could more clearly focus evaluation questions in order to meet the needs of decision-makers.

However, evaluation activities may be conducted for other reasons that are just as valid as having an impact on policy making such as program improvement. In fact, it appears that evaluation payoff is probably higher in those situations where the findings are geared toward more operation-oriented decision-making (Wholey, 1972; Weeks, 1979). In these cases, evaluation findings may serve as a tool to improve the effectiveness of the programs as they are in operation, or in other words, to improve the implementation of the policy. CETA provides a good example of this distinction. Prime sponsor evaluation efforts (and the majority of the CETA literature for that matter) fall into the latter category of program improvement. In general, they describe the program implementation process and exemplary programs. Studies which focus on economic and other outcomes factors such as Baumer et al. (1979) and Borus (1978) will have a better chance on having an impact on policy making because they more directly address ideas in good currency. Vocational education also illustrates this distinction. For example, several projects at the National Center for Research in Vocational Education focus upon program improvement such as identifying patterns of state leadership and teaching the uses of different evaluation strategies to state and local persons while others focus upon outcomes (e.g., McKinney, 1978; Darcy, 1979).

In sum, each type of evaluation effort serves an important purpose. Often they work in tandem for "the formation of policy cannot be neatly separated from its implementation" (Schon, 1971:161). While ideas foremost on the national agenda are the ones often translated into policy.

> The opportunity for learning is primarily in discovered systems at the periphery, not in the nexus of official policies at the center...movement of learning is as much from periphery to periphery, or from periphery to center as from center to periphery. (Schon, 1971:177).

The federal government, thus, cannot serve the role of the local service deliverer. It specifies the broad outline of the desired policy and asks local service deliverers to fill in the blanks through their program designs. Evaluation efforts have a real opportunity to play a role in enhancing this learning process. However, improving methodologies or solely meeting the needs of immediate decision makers is not enough for it only addresses the question of increasing the utilization of evaluation findings geared toward program improvement. However, on the policy level, central to the utilization issue is the purpose of these programs, i.e., are they a vehicle for responding to an idea in good currency or an end in themselves? Social programs are dynamic and complex. Congress authorizes few programs that are not tied to one or several ideas that are of active concern to the public. Programs should be mapped backward to the policies and issues from which they are derived. In this way, evaluators should be better able to derive more salient evaluation questions that meet the underlying information needs of policy makers.

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